

IN DIFFICULT TIMES, LIFE CAN BE STRESSFUL...
ALIGN YOUR PASSION, LEARN SOMETHING NEW TO FIND
SOLACE AND HAPPINESS...

THE MONK KEY SERIES

HOW TO PAINT WITH LIGHT

LEARNING DIGITAL
PHOTOGRAPHY

GOUTAM CHAKRABORTY

WITH

SHASHIDHAR SHARMA

AUTHOR OF SPIRITUAL FICTIONS

SONGS OF THE MIST | KUHASE KE GEET

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THE MONK KEY SERIES

This is the 5th book of “The Monk Key Series”, to provide some mind space to think and act constructively. This eBook is culmination of the ideas, thoughts and own experiences of two friends and professionals as an artist, photographer and an author, who were mindful of the ongoing Covid crisis and got together to collaborate and bring light into the darkness that was spread all around in isolation, quarantine and multiple lock-down periods in India, since March 2020.

And, as we are going through the most challenging time of our life, with chaos of pandemic all around, there is nothing like taking a camera or in some cases, a smart phone to capture light providing interesting patterns, creative interpretations as well as painting the positivity across. We hope that this quick eBook will help to bring mental balance and peace in life and provide some space to be happy and positive.

I thank Sehran Khan for the wonderful cover design and Katyayani Tripathi for editing the series.

PREFACE

Photography is nothing but Painting with Light. Photography artists have created visuals that span various photography genres. Whether its black and white street photography, erotic photography, colorful portraits, or even animal photography - all of these photography genres have been enriched by the magical touch of the medium, which will be continued to be practiced by the photographers of the future generations as well!

Hope this becomes the guide for your first few tentative steps on the path of visual discovery and delight.

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INTRODUCTION

This eBook is primarily for the photography enthusiasts, who are creative and passionate. In my opinion photography has three distinct characteristics which, if the young generation can get to know, they will be able to have more creative output and fun with the medium. The three specific sections that we provided here, if one can understand and work upon as a beginner, then there is no stopping him or her to become a professional photographer.

“Photography is nothing but Painting with Light”. Therefore, understanding light becomes the key element of learning photography. In fact, when an aspiring photographer starts seeing light on all his possible subjects from a creative angle, his photography will reach to the next level immediately.



High contrast B&W photographs are capturing the imaginations of photographers around the world even much after the arrival of colour photography. There is something magical about them.



By definition, the essence of street photography is all about capturing the drama of everyday life and society on the streets as it unfolds. The best thing about street photography is that you can practice it everywhere even in your neighbourhood and need not necessarily travel to any exotic location to capture your great shots.

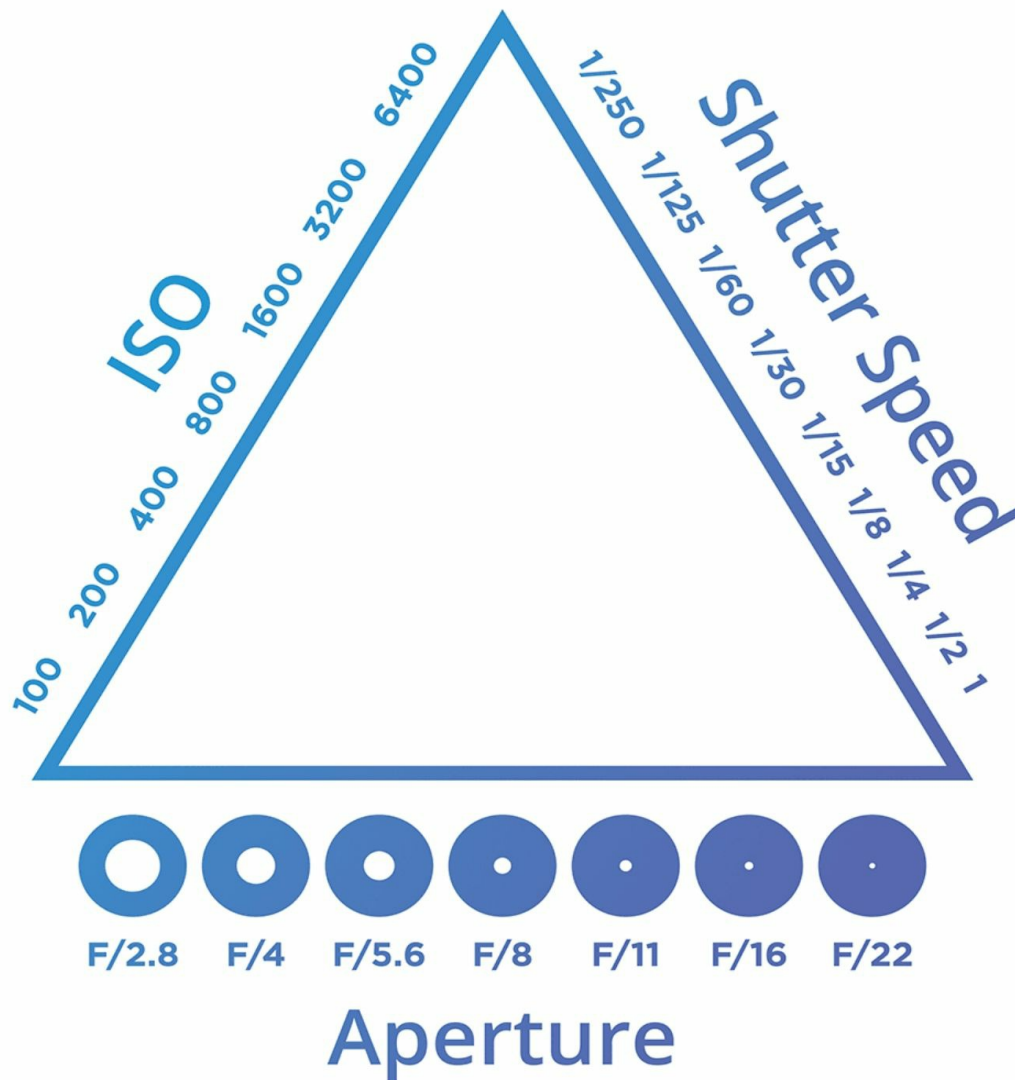


Street photography is spontaneous and waits for no one. It's a discipline you must practice to make perfect. Your camera is an extension of yourself — it's your gateway to sharing your vision with the world and you don't want to miss an amazing photo opportunity by not having your camera with you. If you're serious about street photography, you will have your camera within reach at all times.

I hope that you enjoy reading and learning from these few simple steps to make your own photography – interesting and impactful.

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

In Digital Photography, we have “*Holy Trinity*” and they are called ISO, Aperture & Shutter Speed. Understanding of these three and able to create the perfect combination for a specific light situation is the key to become a good photographer.



Technical expertise of a photographer depends on how well he plays with these three main elements to achieve the optimum level of light penetrating to the sensor to create a great picture [technically great, however the creativity aspect of the photography is to be discussed separately].

ISO in Digital Photography:

ISO is responsible for camera's sensitivity to light. A low ISO setting means the camera will be less sensitive to light, while a higher ISO means it will be more sensitive to light. However, the quality of the image will decrease as the ISO increases and you may see 'noise' on the image with a higher ISO. An ISO setting of 100 to 200 is usually ideal when shooting outdoors during the day, but when shooting in low light situations, such as

indoors or at night, a higher ISO of 600 to 800 or higher might be necessary.

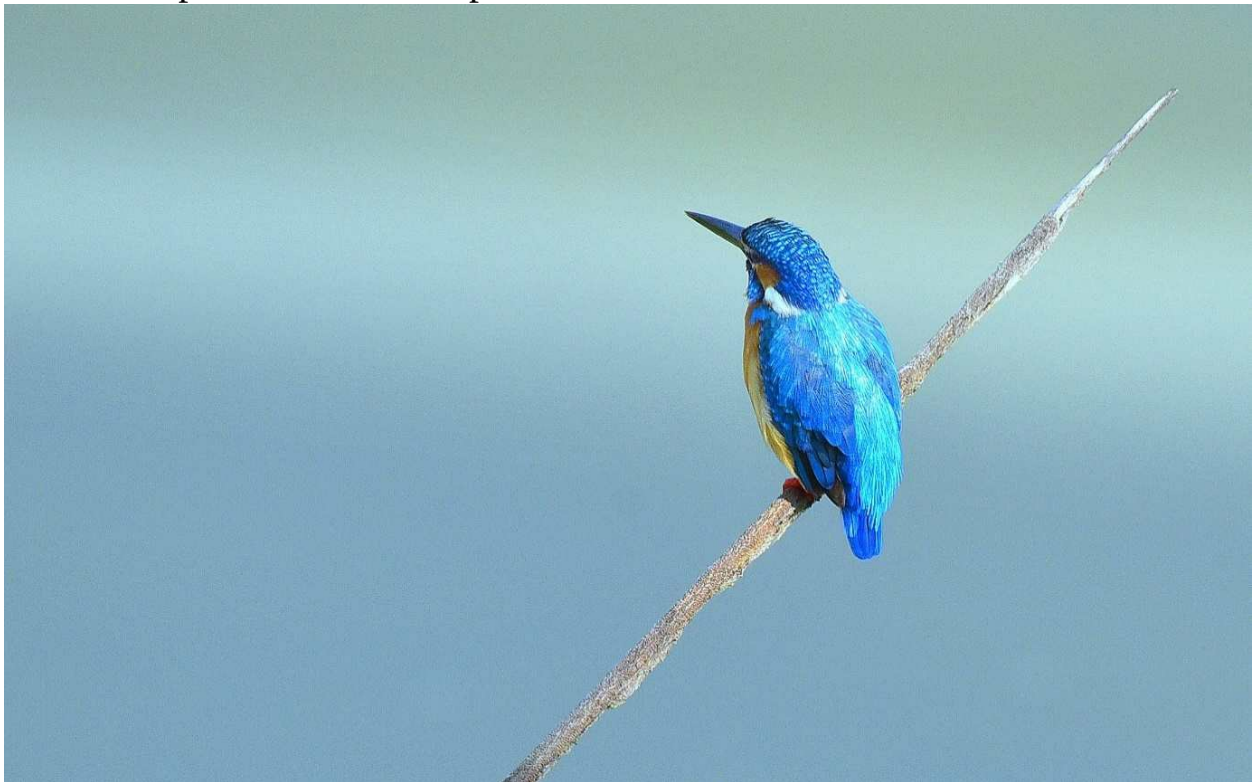
Aperture in Digital Photography:

Aperture is the opening in your lens and controls how much light gets through to the camera's sensor as well as the depth of field. Depth of field refers to the area surrounding the focal point of the image which remains sharp. A wider aperture (indicated by a lower f-number) lets more light through, but has a narrow depth of field. While a narrow aperture (indicated by a higher f-number) lets less light through, but has a wider depth of field. A wide aperture is great when you want to isolate your subject, but when you want the whole scene to be in focus, such as with group shots, you'll need to use a narrow aperture.

Shutter speed in Digital Photography:

Shutter speed controls how long the shutter stays open when you take a picture. The longer the shutter stays open, the more light gets through to the camera's sensor. A fast shutter speed is good for freezing action, while a longer shutter speed will blur motion. Long shutter speeds can give interesting effects, but usually require a tripod.

Wide aperture is best for portraits

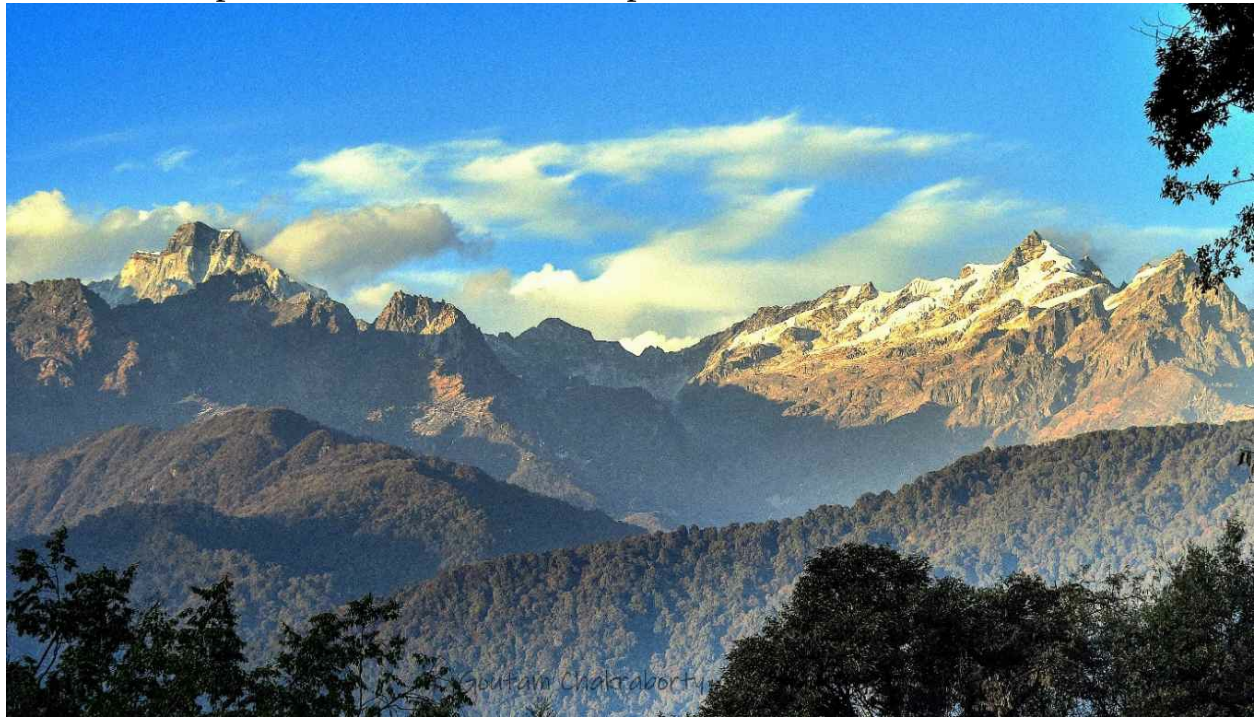


When shooting portraits, whether of people or birds/animals, your subject

should be the main focus of the picture and the best way to achieve this is to use a wider aperture. This will keep your subject sharp, while blurring out any distractions in the background.

Keep in mind that a smaller f/ number means a wider aperture and the wider the aperture, the more dramatic this effect will be. Some lenses can go as low as f/1.2, but even apertures of f/5.6 can do the trick. To better understand how the aperture affects your images, switch to Aperture Priority Mode (Av or A) and try taking some shots with different apertures.

Narrow aperture is best for landscapes



Landscape photographs require a different approach, because everything from the trees in the foreground to the mountains in the background should be sharply in focus. So, any time you're shooting a scene where you want everything to be fully in focus, you should select a narrow aperture rather than a wide one.

A larger f/ number means a narrower aperture, so go towards f/22 or higher, depending on

- a) Light condition
- b) What your lens allows.

Again, using Aperture Priority Mode (Av or A) will allow you to experiment with different apertures without having to worry about adjusting the shutter speed each time.

Following some basic rules can take your photography a couple of notches higher:

Understand the rule of thirds



The rule of thirds is based on the idea that human brain perceives a picture seems to be more interesting and well balanced when they aren't centred. Imagine a grid placed over your images with two vertical lines and two horizontal lines that divide the picture into nine equal sections.

If you were following the rule of thirds, rather than positioning your subject or the important elements of a scene at the centre of the photo, you'd place them along one of the four lines, or at the points where the lines intersect. Some cameras even have a grid option you can turn on, which can be useful if you're still learning to compose your images.

Of course, photography is all about creativity and personal expression, so you may sometimes choose to break this rule and place the points of interest elsewhere in your photo. This is absolutely fine, but before you start breaking this rule, it's important that you understand it and are in the habit of consciously thinking about the points of interest and where you want to place them.

Eyes of the subject should always be in focus



When shooting portraits, or a dramatic shot like this, you'll be focusing on a very small area so it will be more important than ever that you get a nice sharp image. The eyes in particular are an important facial feature, and they're often the first thing people look at, especially when it comes to close-ups and headshots. That's how we connect with the subject.

Let us keep this in mind that your subject's eyes should be your main point of focus. To get both eyes nice and sharp, choose a single focus point and aim it at one of the eyes. Once the first eye is in focus, keep the shutter button pressed halfway down and move the camera slightly to recompose the photo and include the second eye.

Paying attention to the background is very important:



Generally speaking, the background should be as simple and clutter free as possible so that it doesn't pull the viewer's attention away from the main subject of the photograph. Muted colours and plain patterns tend to work well, because you don't want viewers to end up being more interested in the colourful background than your subject.

Fixing a distracting background can be as simple as moving your subject or changing your angle, but if that doesn't work, it may be possible to obscure it by using a wider aperture and getting in as close to your subject as possible. Whenever you can, though, try to keep the background neutral, especially if you're placing your subject off to the side of the photograph and the background is very visible.

IT IS MAGICAL – BLACK & WHITE

Get Some Inspiration

High contrast B&W photographs are capturing the imaginations of photographers around the world even much after the arrival of colour photography. There is something magical about them. If you want to be good with black and white photography, a good way to get inspirations is to look at old black and white photos and movies. You should also go through the works of masters like Henri Cartier-Bresson, James Jowers, Mary Moss, Bruce Davidson, Vivian Maier, Robert Doisneau and our own Rahu Rai, who has taken the to the next level.

Best of all, these black and white images are readily available.



Find a photo that attracts your eye. Then try to find the answers of why does it draw your eye? Is it the contrast? Or the texture or the captured emotion? That will help you to replicate the same in your work.

Emphasize the Contrast

Since black and white photography is all about playing with only black, white, and shades in-between, always emphasize the contrast in the photos you take. When taking a photo, think about how it will look like in black and white. A bright sky will look interesting when contrasted with a dark object. Having a silhouette of a person or object in front of a light background will create some stunning contrast. Contrasts are also used in black and white fashion photography; the options for creative experimentation are limitless. Take a few photos and look for the contrasting elements. This can help you figure out how you can take the perfect shot. The good news with digital photography is that you can take a colour photography and later on can convert it into a B&W photo!



Shoot in RAW and Look at Your Camera Options

RAW should be your go-to format if you're aspiring to be a professional photographer, but it's especially important if you're shooting in black and white. RAW file provides maximum flexibility to tweak the photo to the best of your ability and be able to change it back to colour should the image not work in black and white.

Tip: Your camera may have a black and white option as well, which can give you a good idea of what the photo will look like in black and white. If you are doing black and white flower photography and you want to understand the effect of light and the shape that is coming out, the black and white or monochrome option will help you better understand.

Experiment with Exposure

With photography in general, you don't want to stay on "normal" exposure forever; black and white portrait photography is a good area to experiment with exposure. Sometimes, over or underexposing, your photos can add some dramatic effects. This is especially important with black and white landscape photography. Whenever you find a shot that you want to use for a black and white photo potentially, you should always experiment with various levels of exposure and see which one turns out the best. Also, look at

the exposure of natural lighting. Flat light, where there isn't much exposure, can enhance your image by quite a bit.



Look for Patterns

A good photo typically has some pattern to it. Something that makes the viewers' eyes follow the pattern and look for more patterns. Patterns can be rocks on the ground, blades of grass, cars going from left to right, and any other repeating object, texture, or design. For example, capturing patterns in black and white street photography can make your images distinct and make the main subject really grab attention. Patterns work really well in black and white photography because there are no colours to distract you.



When taking a shot, look for patterns. If your eye follows a pattern, this may be a good sign that you should take that shot. Give it a try and see what you come up with.

It's about expressing emotions, not just removing colours.

There are some photos that you may think will look great in black and white because they lack colour to begin with. A photo of a black and white checkered floor. A close-up of a zebra. A dark, gray sky. You may think that these photos will benefit from a black and white filter, but the truth is that great black and white photography is all about telling a story, highlighting a subject and expressing emotions, without the distraction of colours. It is not about shooting subjects that lack colour to start with.



Some advantages of B&W photography

1. No distracting colours.

Colours are great, but they can add some distractions to your photos. The magic of black and white photography is that it lacks those distracting colours and allows you to see contrast and patterns that you may not have seen in a colour photo.

2. It can bring out emotion.

When you look at a black and white photo, you may think of timelessness. That photo might have been taken currently or a long time back. Also, black and white photos have the powers of communicating different human emotions more intensely!

3. More experimentation.

While you definitely want to experiment with colour photos, black and white photos provide more opportunities to a photographer for experimentations.

In brief, Black and white photography artists have created visuals that span various photography genres. Whether its black and white street photography, erotic photography, portraits, or even black and white animal photography - all of these photography genres have been enriched by the magical touch of B&W medium, which will be continued to be practiced by the photographers of the future generations as well!

STREET SMART

Making Your Street Photography Interesting!



By definition, the essence of street photography is all about capturing the drama of everyday life and society on the streets as it unfolds. The best thing about street photography is that you can practice it everywhere even in your neighbourhood and need not necessarily travel to any exotic location to capture your great shots.

It produces great result when done candidly without your subject's knowledge. However, street photography may also be staged. It is all about your instinct. You may spot an interesting character that catches your vision; you can wander up to strangers and ask for permission to take their picture. This is a great way to get a more intimate portrait of someone in his or her environment.

The beauty with street photography is to have fun and enjoy getting out with your camera. Seeing the familiar or a new piece of the society through the viewfinder of your DSLR is truly exciting. Remember as a street photographer your goal is to capture emotion, humanity, a "Story" which your picture will tell. It takes time to get your dream shot, but with some practice and patience you will reach there soon.



Selection of the best lens

Deciding which lens to use is one of the most important factors for street photography. You may be tempted to use a telephoto lens, but that may not be the best thing to do, standing across the road aiming a giant lens at strangers. You need to get up close and among the action. Use a wide-angle lens and get lost in a busy crowd. Many street photographers choose a compact camera that's less confronting than a large DSLR, the advantages being smaller, lightweight, and discreet.



© Gautam Chakraborty



Preferred Camera settings

The Easiest way to set up your camera for street photography is by switching the camera to AV (aperture-priority mode) and selecting your f-stop (aperture) and ISO manually. The camera will then decide the shutter speed (exposure). On a bright sunny day, a good place to start is around f/11 with an ISO between 200-600. If your camera displays a shutter speed higher than 1/200th a second, be assured that you will get a good outcome.

Take note of the shutter speed your camera is reading and make adjustments to aperture and ISO accordingly. If your camera is giving you a shutter speed that is below 1/80th you run the risk of a blurred shot. To overcome blur simply increase your ISO and/or choose a wider aperture [lower f point]. If you're new to photography you can always set camera to P mode (program or auto) and let the camera select the correct settings.

This is useful if you are shooting in a hurry with no time to think (mostly you will encounter these kinds of situations on the street), but you have little control over what the camera is doing, so this isn't always the best option. Program mode does a pretty decent job, but in low light where there's a high possibility your shutter speed will be too slow to freeze the action.

Get close to your subjects

Using a wide-angle lens enables you to get close to your subjects. The advantage of the wide angle gives the viewer a sense of being there in the moment & fill the action. You'll also blend in with the crowd as part of the environment, rather than standing out across the street with a long lens.

Many successful street photos were taken only few meters from the action and sometimes even further closer. Walking through a busy street, market or park can result in some rewarding pictures if you are observant and keep your eyes open for interesting subjects. If your images aren't the way you visualized them, then you may need to get closer, so use your feet as your zoom to be sure you're in the right place and clicking with the interesting angle.





Take your camera everywhere

Street photography is spontaneous and waits for no one. It's a discipline you must practice to make perfect. Your camera is an extension of yourself — it's your gateway to sharing your vision with the world and you don't want to miss an amazing photo opportunity by not having your camera with you. If you're serious about street photography, you will have your camera within reach at all times.

This is known as the 'decisive moment,' where you have only a split second to capture your subject before it's gone forever. You rarely get a second chance, so be prepared.



Get out of your comfort zone

Lot of aspiring street photographer struggle with discomfort of taking a photograph without the consent of the subject. Their concerns may be the fear

about their subjects getting angry because you took their picture, threaten you with physical violence, or even calling the police. These are all common fears, but it's possible to overcome by practicing and getting out more with your camera. A broad smile on your face is always a good protection and always be aware of your surroundings.





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Shoot from the hip

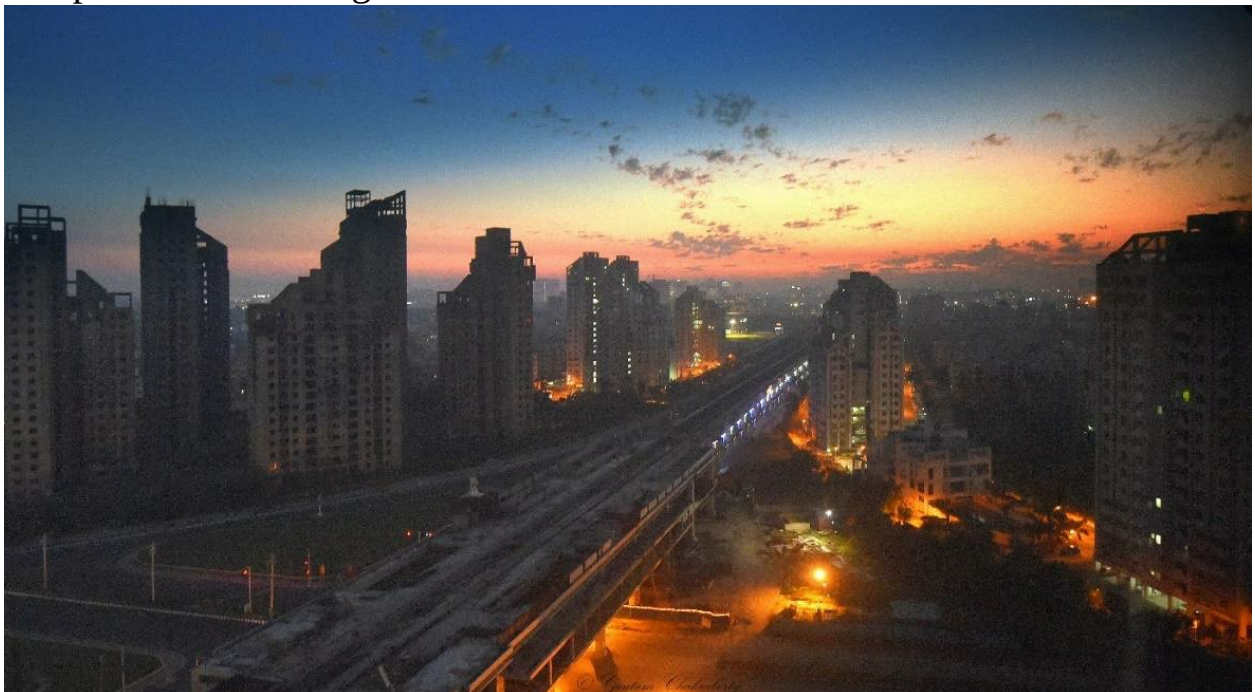
As a general rule of street photography, if you can get the shot with the camera at your eye level, you will get a better shot. However, there are times when it's not possible to raise the camera to your eye, and so shooting from the hip is a useful method of capturing a decisive moment.

Those, for whom it is difficult holding the camera to their eye level and pointing it towards strangers, it would good if they start holding their camera by the hip to capture more candid pictures without the knowledge of their subject. You may not be successful at first, but with practice you will start getting wonderful candid pictures with this method.



Shoot at night

Night photography in the city is a great opportunity for unique images. It's not as easy as shooting during the day; you will need to be mindful of low shutter speeds to avoid blur and use your ISO and aperture to compensate for low light.



Take a tripod with you if you plan on doing long exposures. Alternatively, using a fast aperture lens will enable you to shoot low-light scenes and still freeze the action. When shooting at night try finding interesting lines, shadows and compositions to give the image a bold visual statement. Silhouetted subjects are interesting and can create nice compositions with the shadow filling the foreground.



Use Unconventional Angles

We are most comfortable seeing object from the eye level. You can always add a new perspective to your photography by changing the viewing angle. Not only your picture will get an immediate attention but also convey your story more interestingly.





When you See things instead of looking at

When you are in the present, your eyes are seeing and your brain is thinking fast, a new world may unfold to you through which a powerful story-telling from the street photography may emerged! Most people wrongly associate street photography with people or portraits on the street. You don't always need people in frame or capturing interesting juxtapositions or fitting as many different people or objects into frame.

It may be difficult in some busy places, but take a walk down a quiet alleyway or side street and look for different subjects that interest you. There are infinite opportunities for all kinds of images with or without people.



Make it a fun

As conventional wisdom tells, it's important to enjoy what you do and do what you enjoy. If shooting on the street, getting in close contact with

unknown people, doesn't sound like your kind of thing, then chances are you'll probably take ordinary images. Creativity flows where the passion lives. So, do what makes you happy, not what other people expect to see. Most of the street photographer love shooting on the street because it takes them out and it's about, meeting interesting people, and seeing everyday life from a fresh perspective and sometime being part of it.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

1. Subject's eyes should be your main point of focus.
2. Whenever you can, though, try to keep the background neutral.
3. RAW should be your go-to format if you're aspiring to be a professional photographer.
4. There is magic in B&W medium, it colors all genres of photography.
5. Black and white photography is all about telling a story, highlighting a subject and expressing emotions, without the distraction of colors.
6. As a photographer, your goal is to capture emotion, humanity, a "story" which your picture will tell.
7. Street Photography is not portrait or people.
8. If you're serious about street photography, you will have your camera within reach at all times.
9. Use your feet as your zoom to be sure you're in the right place
10. Make it a fun

END NOTE

Finally, I would like to say that the world needs its photographers, who are the mirror to the society we all are living in. We are there to host, to heal our viewers within the images of what we paint with light.

As my friend, philosopher and guide, Timeri N Murari said in one of my Creativity workshops, “*Write for yourself first, without any thoughts of future result*” echoing the famous Bhagwat Gita...

Karmanyē vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana,

Ma Karmaphalaheturbhurma Te Sangostvakarmani - Verse 47 from Chapter 2

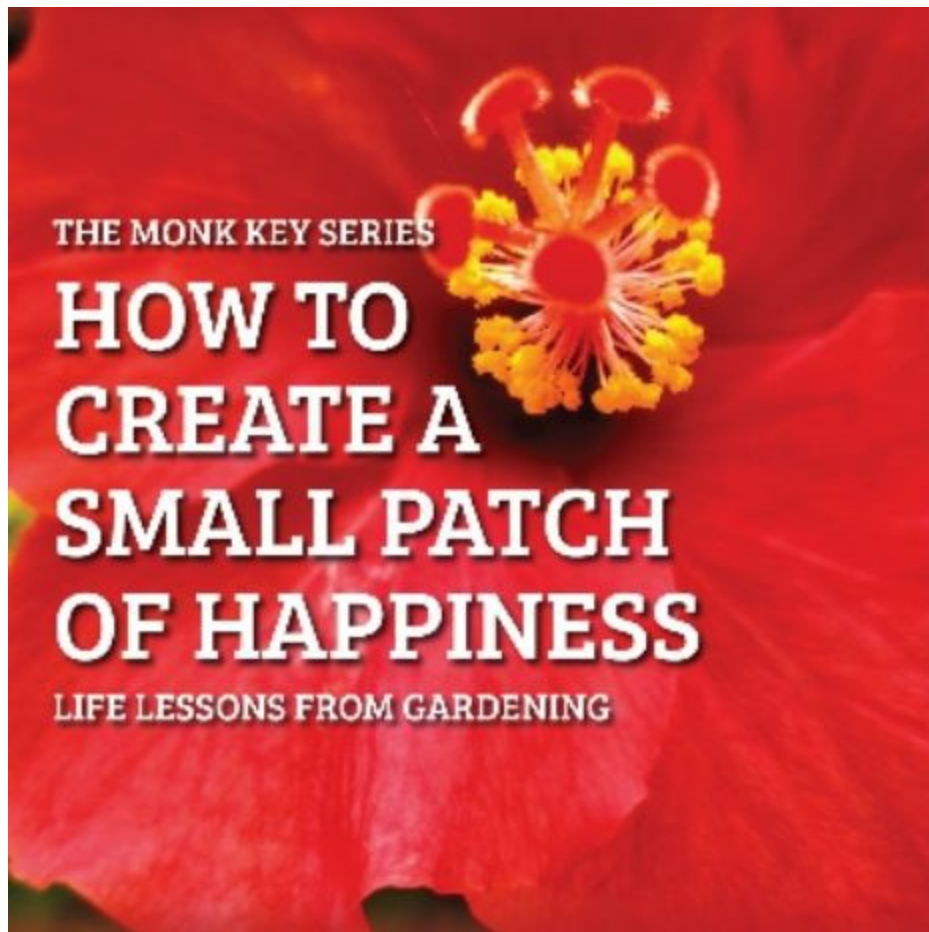
You have the right to work only but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction.

THE MONK KEY SERIES



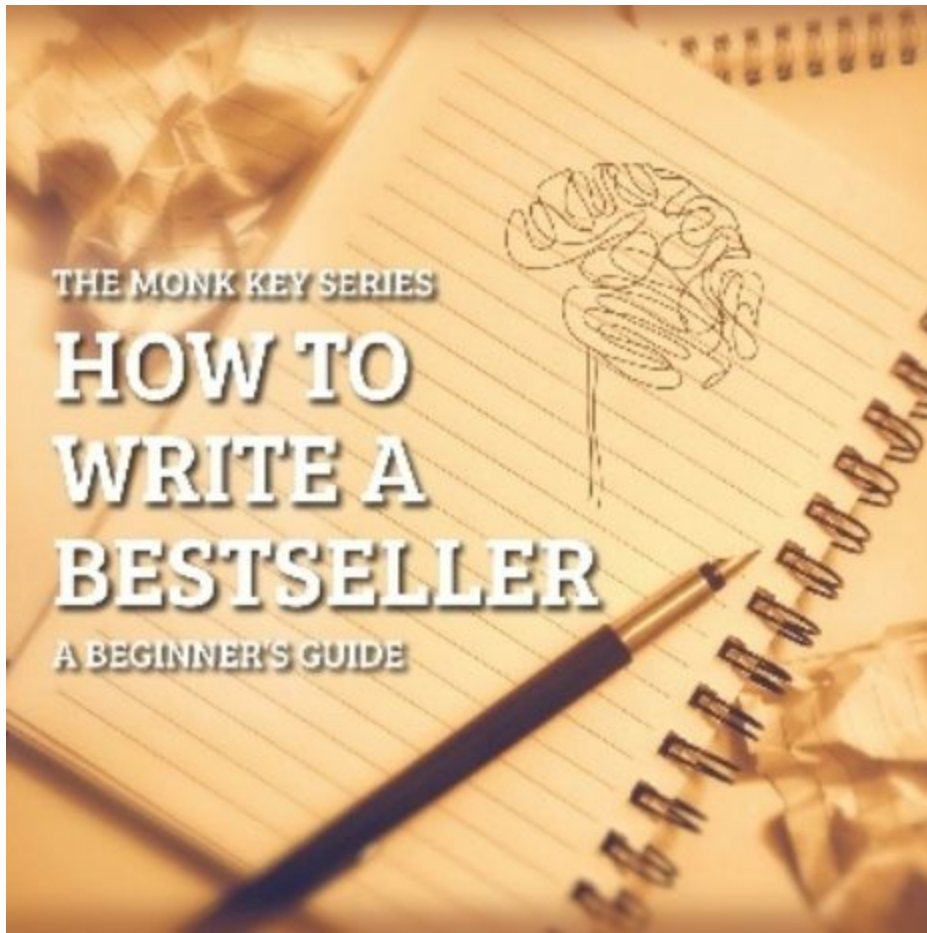
LIVING IN COVID TIMES: AN ACTION PLAN

Living in COVID times, life can become stressful and full of negativity. We need to actively work on our inner strength, and more importantly, on our immune systems with positive ideas and actions. Otherwise, our minds will get bogged down with morbid thoughts and feelings. Biologically, may lead to weakness and reduced fighting capabilities against diseases. I went through the longest lockdown in the world as the pandemic reached Indian shores in 2020. I experienced another in April 2021 with a Covid Positive family member, isolated and in quarantine. In those dark days and silent nights, I found solace in my own inner reflection, creativity, and passion. This book is an action plan, born out of my own experiments with solitude, worry, and despair to give you 'The Monk Key' to unlock your own inner strength and find hope in challenging times.



HOW TO CREATE A SMALL PATCH OF HAPPINESS: LIFE LESSONS FROM GARDENING

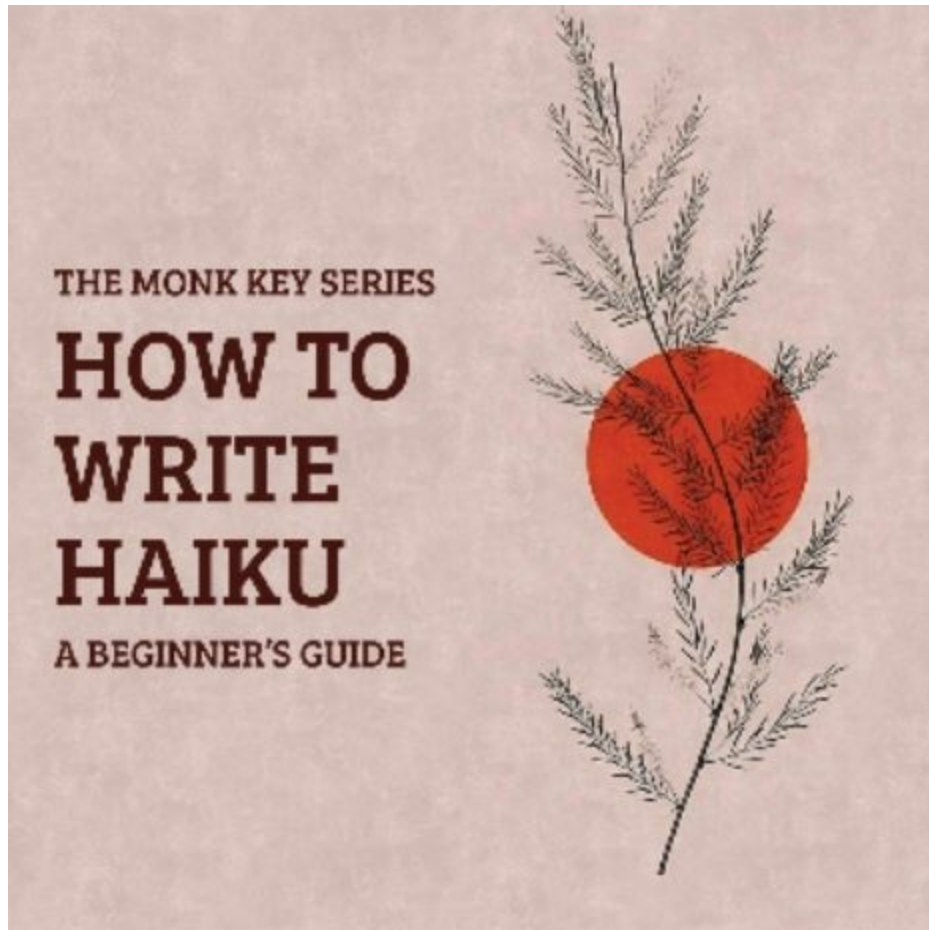
All our life, we follow our instincts of survival and sustenance to become what we are today. Sometimes, we take a certain path believing it to be a successful journey but end up getting lost. It's the faith and feeling that remains true in our heart. If we can relate to that internal feeling, then we can also relate to the immense universal consciousness outside the realm of our understanding and live a happy and meaningful life. This is a journey of creating happiness within and from nature. Come and join in my journey. Maybe we will learn something new and creative in these difficult times.



HOW TO WRITE A BESTSELLER: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

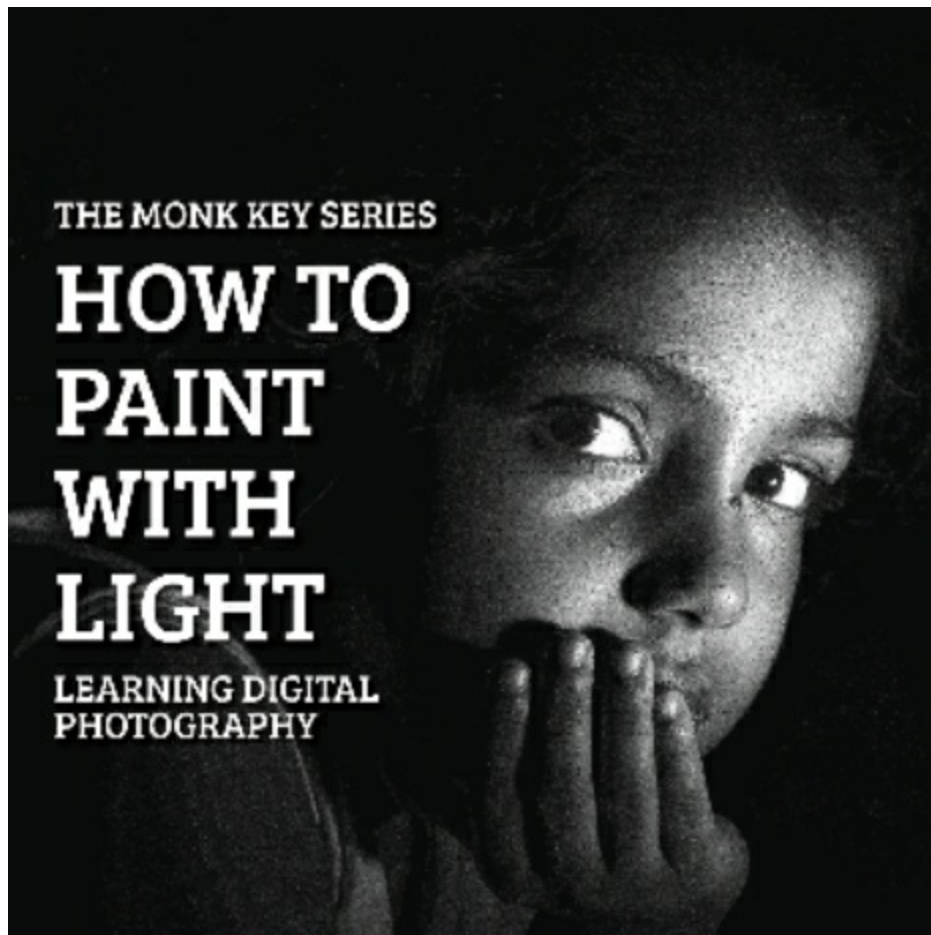
As the publishing industry has entered the Kindle Age, the floodgates have opened for new authors and new writing styles. Every day, thousands of books are getting published through online platforms and are effectively being marketed through social media networks. This has created a new generation of bestselling authors. And I believe that everyone who has survived adolescence can become a writer, since everyone has a story to tell and an experience to share. So, give your writing a chance and do the simple things listed out in this book, and you can be on your way to writing your own bestseller. Writing has been a passion for decades and the key to my work-life balance. The simple act of writing brings clarity to my thoughts and mindful living in awareness. However, in my own journey of writing two of my books "Songs of the Mist" (bestseller rank #29 at Amazon in year 2016) and "Kuhase Ke Geet", I have realized the importance of reaching out to readers in an efficient and effective manner. And if you know how, it is quite easily done through Social Media Network, Online Platforms and Publishing houses. This book is an easy, step-by-step guide for you to find your

readers...



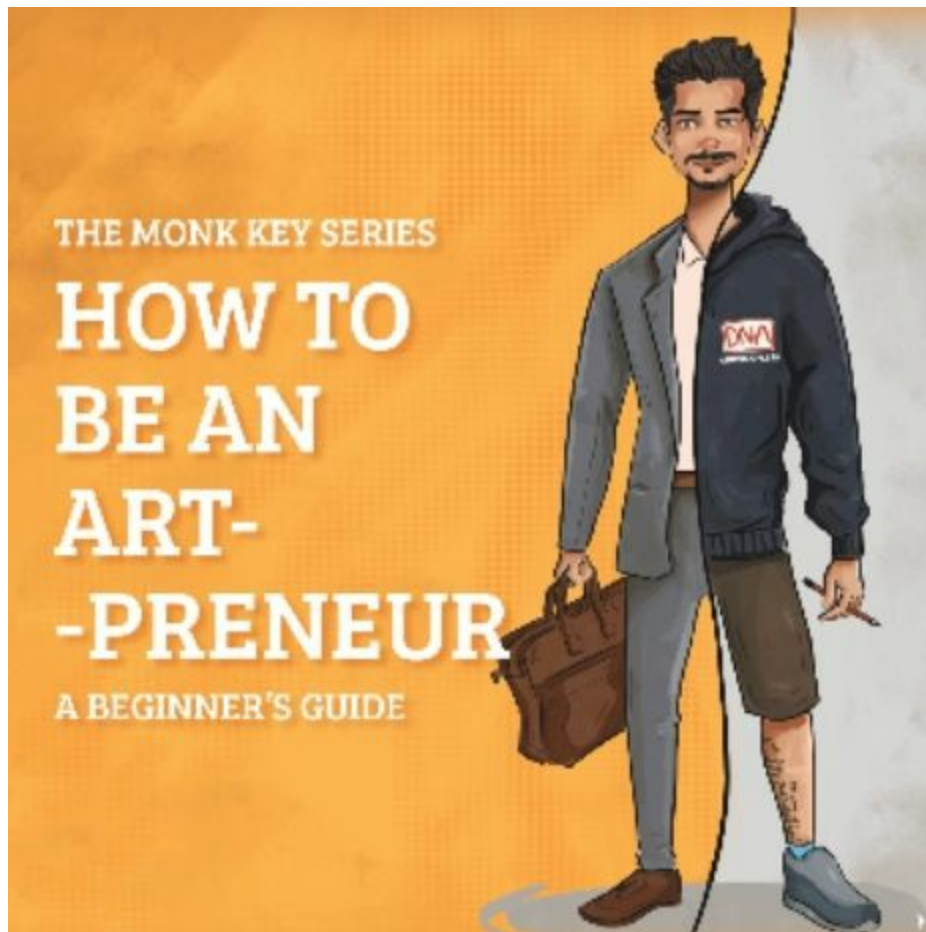
HOW TO WRITE HAIKU: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

I have been reading and writing Haiku, one of the most popular form of poetry, for more than three decades. I have also been sharing them with my friends and peers, as well as on my online platforms. Many times, I have been asked, "*What is a Haiku, and how do you write one?*" In simple words, a Haiku is an iconic form of poetic expression which conveys a vivid image or a poetic moment within 5-7-5 syllables in short 3-line format. Over the years, I have explained the form to many aspiring Haiku writers through some examples, personal discussions, and through my online articles. But I believe to really know what "Haiku" is, we should have a holistic and sincere approach towards its understanding as well as writing one. Hope this book will find new admirers of this wonderful poetic form and put aspiring Haiku writers on a path of deeper understanding and writing some of their own.



HOW TO PAINT WITH LIGHT: LEARNING DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography is nothing but Painting with Light. Photographers have created visuals that span various photography genres. Whether its black and white street photography, erotic photography, colorful portraits, or even animal photography - all of these photography genres have been enriched by the magical touch of the medium, which will be continued to be practiced by the photographers of the future generations as well! Hope this becomes the guide for your first few tentative steps on the path of visual discovery and delight.



HOW TO BE AN ARTPRENEUR: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

In this book, Ajay Sharma talks about his journey as an artist and a computer engineer and he shares his business-minded tips and tricks which are time-tested with his experience to become an 'Artpreneur'. It proves to readers as a pathway to achieve a breakthrough system to get better and faster results in a creator's creative journey.

THE MONK KEY SERIES

It is important to keep ourselves positive and engaged with family, friends and our inner-self, in these difficult times. And, in my opinion, the best way is to rekindle your passion and find some interesting things to do. "The Monk Key" series, published by 'Books & Beyond Publishing House' is available Free on Kindle Prime to read.

These books are milestones on a path of finding equanimity and happiness, in the face of negativity and pain. Hope you will find the required breathing space from chaos and these books will become a catalyst for you to learn something new and interesting...



Goutam was born in 1968, Kolkata, India. Though a Science graduate from Kolkata University and a Marketing Diplomat with ICWA (Inter), he had a passion for painting & photography since childhood. He continued painting and photography as a hobby along with his day's job which was 11 years with Media & 19 years with real estate. In 1998, he migrated from New Delhi to Bangalore where he ultimately settled down with his family. Destiny connected Goutam with Murali Cheerth, an MFA from Shantiniketan & a well-known artist in the art fraternity, and with multi-talented & acclaimed writer Shashidhar Sharma. The materialization of this book is the direct outcome of that! Goutam is the Managing Director for a startup called Brickbiyte since a year.

Books & Beyond Independent Publishing House,
Bengaluru, India

